CSABA CZEGLÉDI

ANDREW VÁZSONYI: *TÚL A KECEGÁRDÁN, CALUMET-VIDÉKI AMERIKAI MAGYAR SZÓTÁR*

[Beyond Castle Garden: An American Hungarian Dictionary of the Calumet Region].
Edited and introduction by Miklós Kontra.
A Magyarságkutatás könyvtára XV.
Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 1995. 242 pp.

Beyond Castle Garden is a unique dialect dictionary—and more. Two of its prominent features make it a particularly important book: (1) The dictionary was compiled on the basis of tape-recorded actual language use and (2) it is the first, last, and only record of a now extinct variety of Hungarian.

Given the startling rate at which languages disappear on this planet, *Beyond Castle Garden* is an especially valuable document. The vast majority of the world's languages are moribund. Around 1990, merely five speakers of Iowa were alive, only two old people spoke the Eyak language of Alaska as their native language, and the Ubykh language of the Northwest Caucasus, a record holder among the world's languages boasting some 80 consonants, had no more than a single speaker. At the same time, only 2 of the 20 native languages of Alaska were still spoken by children, 80% of the 187 languages of North America and Canada were on the verge of extinction, and 90% of the 250 aboriginal languages of Australia were "VERY near extinction"

(Krauss 1992:4—5). Many of the languages that were moribund a few years ago are probably extinct now.

Every time the last speaker of an unrecorded language dies his language dies with him, and with each language gone the diversity of the phenomenon of natural language as well as our chance to better understand its nature suffers. It is an ecological, if not a cultural, commonplace that the diversity of the fauna and flora is mankind's invaluable heritage. The diversity of natural languages is no less valuable for linguistic research. Therefore it is hard to overestimate the significance of records of endangered languages or languages that have, by now, become extinct.

The set of extinct or endangered languages and dialects is larger than many of us would have imagined, and it is growing at an astonishing rate. Many people may not have known that only fairly recently the set of extinct languages gained a new member. A variety of Hungarian which was still spoken some thirty years ago by a community of Hungarian-American immigrants in the Calumet region, south-east of Chicago, is now gone forever. *Beyond Castle Garden* is the first and only record of this short-lived dialect—American Hungarian (AH).

In addition to the significance of its AH data for a better understanding of language contact phenomena in general and the processes of interference, borrowing, and language loss, *Beyond Castle Garden* has plenty to offer to the general reader as well. It contains some instructive reading for those interested not only in the language but also in the life and culture of a community of Hungarians who once lived in the Calumet region. To more linguistically minded readers, it offers a concise introduction to some basic sociolinguistic concepts and issues, such as language contact, bilingualism, interference, code switching, etc.

The book opens with two short prefaces—one in Hungarian (Előszó, 6) and one in English (Preface, 7), both written by Miklós Kontra, in which the editor introduces the reader to the compiler Andrew Vázsonyi and his wife and co-fieldworker Linda Dégh, who

went out to study the "lifestyles, traditions, and language of Hungarian-Americans living in the industrial settlements of the Calumet region on Lake Michigan" in the mid-1960s (7).

In the *Bevezető*/Introduction (8—18/19—24), the editor first tells us briefly about the history and genesis of the dictionary (8—9/19). An explanation of some differences between its first part, which was written by Andrew Vázsonyi and is published in its original form, and the second part written by Miklós Kontra "on the basis of Vázsonyi's cards" (9—10/20—21) is followed by a description of its character, pointing to some special features that make the dictionary unique in the context of Hungarian as well as international lexicography (10—14/21). Then the editor outlines the structure of entries (15—16/22—23) and discusses "some problems with the data" (17—18/23—24). Incorporated in the *Bevezető* is a short essay on code switching, borrowing, and language interference in bilingual speakers (13—14).

The *Bevezető* and the Introduction are followed by the *Szótár* (Dictionary) (26—125) with a total of 1149 AH headwords. Each entry contains part of speech specification of the headword, its meaning, the model English word which was the source of the AH headword, the meaning of the model (which normally repeats the meaning specification for the AH headword), example sentences, each with the monogram of the informant from whom the sentence was recorded, and occasional references to the frequency of usage of the headword in AH.

The dictionary is followed in turn by two essays in Hungarian, which surround a section of short and highly informative biographies of the informants, also in Hungarian (156—180). The first essay is by Linda Dégh (Andrew Vázsonyi's wife and collaborator), in which she discusses the style, attitude, and research method of her husband as well as the culture and language of Hungarian-Americans in the Calumet region (126—155). The essay by Andrew Vázsonyi on the life of Calumet region Hungarian-Americans appears in Hungarian translation. The key category of the essay is the "star boarder," a major

character in the life of the Hungarian immigrant community (181—196).

The appendices include two excerpts from Vázsonyi's notes on certain lexicographic and linguistic problems (197—199) and four Hungarian interview transcripts discussing the learning, knowledge, and preservation of Hungarian in America (200—205).

The penultimate section of the book is the Index, an alphabetic list of the English model words with their AH loan word counterparts (206—220).

Finally, appendixed to the dictionary are documents and photographs depicting the life of American Hungarians. These include, among other things, a photograph of the Castle Garden, a map of the Calumet region (where, unfortunately, some of the place names appear in such small print that they are extremely difficult to make out), a photograph of Andrew Vázsonyi from 1967, and a reproduction of a page from Vázsonyi's original typescript.

Undoubtedly, the most valuable part of *Beyond Castle Garden* is the dictionary, which is based on a collection of "'Hunglish' words and dialogs" on cards from 120 tapes of interviews with 140 informants conducted between 1964 and 1967. The most interesting feature of the dictionary from a lexicographic point of view is no doubt the fact that "the examples are not invented sentences but instances of actual spoken language use—a feature of this dictionary which became an innovation of English lexicography only in 1987 when the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* was published" (21).

The dictionary in *Beyond Castle Garden* is an invaluable document of a now extinct variety of American Hungarian, which, as the editor points out, is thus rescued for posterity (21). If it is appropriate to say that Andrew Vázsonyi, the original compiler of the dictionary, rescued AH for posterity, it is equally appropriate to say that Miklós Kontra, the editor, rescued Andrew Vázsonyi's manuscript and cards for aftertime. Had it not been for the editor's determination to finish the work that Vázsonyi's death in 1986 prevented the collector and compiler from

completing, many of us might never even have heard of this variety of American Hungarian.

Interestingly, the motivation for Linda Dégh, the initiator of the project, to go and study the language of Hungarian immigrants in America derived from field work she had conducted among peasant communities in Hungary, collecting folk stories in Szabolcs and Szatmár. She says there was practically no family without some American connection there (127—28). This may explain why research focused on peasant immigrants who had settled in America between 1900 and 1928 and their descendants.

Andrew Vázsonyi was a writer and journalist by profession. He had received training in law, philosophy, aesthetics, and psychology, and was attracted to the idea of research into the life and language of Hungarians in America through the interest he shared with his wife in folk stories (128). His broad education in the humanities and lack of that in linguistics might explain his prescriptive approach to language use and some rather unorthodox decisions he occasionally took on matters of language and lexicography. His prescriptive attitude often reveals itself in characterizations of AH as a "corrupt language" with a "distorted pronunciation" and "twisted words" (198).

Any lexicographer faces the difficult task of deciding what to include and what not to include in his or her dictionary. Some arbitrariness in making such decisions is often inevitable. In Vázsonyi's case, the difficulty was aggravated by having to decide what was and what was not AH in the speech of Hungarian-Americans. Vázsonyi adopted the following principle in selecting his material: He required of words-to-be-recorded in the dictionary that they "occur in Hungarian syntax with Hungarian suffixation, etc.," but "a distortion of words as dictated by the rules of Hungarian" was not a condition of inclusion (198).

There are two problems with the requirement that AH lexical items occur in Hungarian syntax. The first concerns the very notion of Hungarian syntax. Although it is obvious that English was the lexifier for AH, with the substrate language retaining much of its syntax, it is

equally clear that the syntax of AH was not left intact by English. Thus, the syntactic phenomena of AH are often hard to characterize specifically either as Hungarian or as English. Indeed, AH often exhibits syntactic properties of both languages, which is evident from data recorded in the dictionary, such as, for example, *Csak akrosz a striten voltak tőlem* ('They were across the street from me') (s.v. *akrosz*). This is like English and unlike Hungarian in that it contains a prepositional phrase (*akrosz a striten*), and it is like Hungarian and unlike English in that the noun phrase complement of the preposition is inflected for case.

The principles of determining which language a particular idiom is a dialect of and the principles of determining whether a particular idiom is to be regarded as a dialect of some language or a separate language are far from clear-cut. Language boundaries tend to be determined partly on arbitrary grounds and, only too often, the linguistic principles are "supplemented" with political, geographic, cultural, and perhaps other linguistically irrelevant considerations. We must, in this respect, give credit to Andrew Vázsonyi for admitting that the selection was carried out on the basis of rather "subjective" criteria and assumptions.

It may not have been the best decision on Andrew Vázsonyi's part to let Gyula Décsi dissuade him from employing phonetic representations in the dictionary entries. Vázsonyi admits that the pronunciation of words was a consideration in deciding what should and what should not be included in the dictionary. He had decided, for instance, to ignore "English words which were pronounced correctly, without Hungarian suffixes by a fluent speaker of English whose English was perhaps even better than his or her Hungarian" (197). It goes, again, to Andrew Vázsonyi's credit that at least he honestly admits that "the selection [was] to a certain extent subjective. You simply feel whether [a particular word] was used as an element of Pidgin-Hungarian or in quotation marks, so to speak" (197).

Intuitive speculation about AH pronunciation is dodgy. A more careful analysis of the pronunciation of AH words and their English models might have revealed, for example, that *stritt* is probably not an

instance of spelling pronunciation (199). The initial [ʃ] in AH *stritt* is very likely not a result of the combined influence of the spelling of English *street* and the phonetic value ([ʃ]) of the letter *s* in Hungarian. There are varieties of American English in which the initial sound in words like *street, strong, straight*, etc. is considerably palatalized into a [ʃ]-like sound with the effect that this variant of /s/ may very easily have been perceived by Hungarians as a "Hungarian [ʃ]," for which they may have substituted the phonetically closest Hungarian consonant, pronounced in words like *strandtáska* ('beach bag').

It is often equally difficult to identify the source of an AH word on an intuitive basis. Vázsonyi himself might have suspected that the AH verb *faniz* meaning "'tréfál vkivel'" (72) may not have been a direct loan of *make fun*, which has a similar meaning in English. Thus, the query after the model expression in the entry of *faniz* probably has a different function than in the entry of *brérâj*. In the latter, it seems to indicate the uncertain origin of the word, but in the former it is very likely an indication of the *compiler's* uncertainty concerning the way the model word should be given. The expression *make fun*, given as the model for the AH headword *faniz*, does have a similar meaning but it quite obviously cannot have been the model for the AH *word*. As a matter of fact, there was probably no direct model for this word at all, but it may have been derived language internally from the AH word *fani*, meaning 'funny'.

One must also be careful with the semantic characterization of AH words. The meaning of AH *diferál* is, quite simply, incorrectly given in the dictionary. The examples in the entry clearly show that *diferál* does not mean "'különbözik'" ('differ', 'be different') but that it means 'makes a difference' ('számít', 'fontos', 'nem mindegy'). Consider these examples in the entry of *diferál: Az nem diferál nekem* ('That makes no difference to me', cf. Standard Hungarian (SH) *Az nekem nem számít*), *Száz dollár, az már diferál* ('A hundred dollars—that makes a difference', cf. SH *Száz dollár, az már számít*). Similarly, AH *diferensz, diferenc* also do not only mean "'különbség'" ('difference') as in *Ötezer dollár a diferenc* ('The difference is five thousand dollars', cf. SH *Ötezer*

dollár a különbség), but in the sense illustrated by the examples below they are synonymous with the AH verb *diferál* ('makes a difference') in sentences like *Itt nem diferensz, hogy ki hú* ('Here, it makes no difference who is who', cf. SH *Itt nem számít, hogy ki kicsoda*). Note that 'különbség' would yield the SH "translation" **Itt nem különbség, hogy ki kicsoda*, which is not even grammatical.

For all its blemishes, which basically stem from the apparently insufficient training in linguistics the compiler Andrew Vázsonyi had had, *Beyond Castle Garden* is an important book, whose chief value for the researcher is that it preserves a fragment of an exotic variety of Hungarian. Dialects that emerge in contact situations, such as AH, may be of special interest since they often exhibit features not found in mainstream language varieties. Therefore *Beyond Castle Garden* is a valuable source not only on language contact phenomena but on the structure of language in general.

WORK CONSULTED

Krauss, Michael. 1992. The world's languages in crisis. *Language* 68:4—10.